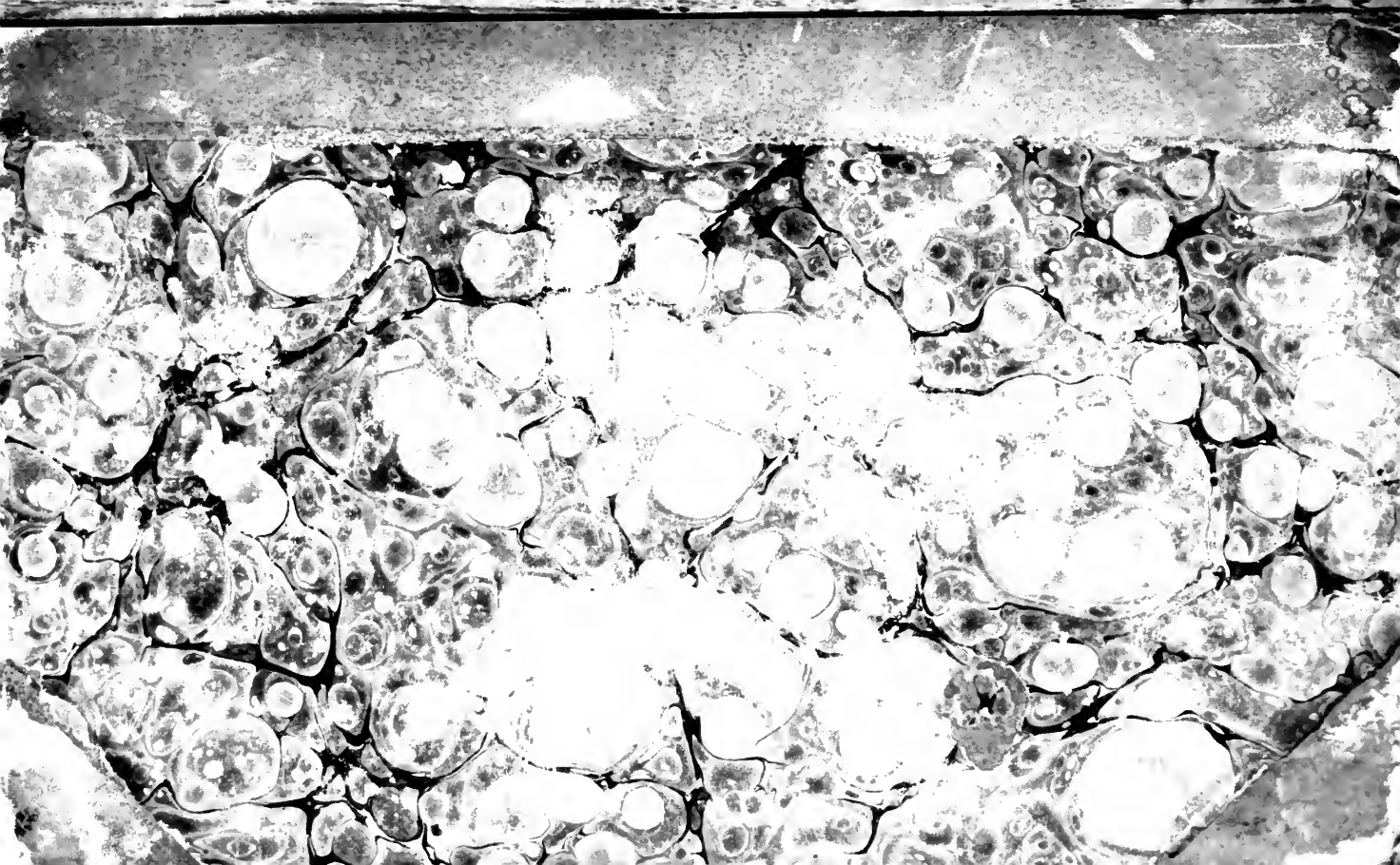

THE SONG OF ASCENT.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED

ON THE THIRD OF APRIL, 1825,

BEING THE

Fourteenth Anniversary,

OF THE

DEDICATION

OF THE

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

IN

CHARLESTON, S. C.

BY T. CHARLTON HENRY, D. D.
PASTOR OF SAID CHURCH.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE CORPORATION

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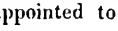
1825

Extract from the Minutes of the Corporation of the Second Presbyterian Church, April 6, 1825.

RESOLVED, unanimously, that the thanks of the Corporation be presented to the Rev. Dr. HENRY, for the very appropriate Anniversary Sermon delivered to the Congregation on the last Sabbath, and that a Committee of three be appointed to wait upon Dr. HENRY for a copy of the same for publication.

Committee, WM. SMITH, Jun. *President*; Messrs. ANTHONY and O'NEALE, *Members*.

B. HAMMET, *Secretary*.



To the Corporation of the Second Presbyterian Church, Charleston, S.C.

GENTLEMEN,

In compliance with the request which you have made through a Committee, I send you the enclosed Discourse. You are perfectly aware, that much of it has an exclusive reference to the Congregation for whom it was written. But as it is intended for their use, and as they have expressed a desire to possess copies of it, I send it without an apology for its imperfections.

With a grateful sense of the unremitting kindness which I have received from your body, and with affectionate regard,

I am, Gentlemen,

Your Obedient Servant,

T. CHARLTON HENRY

Charleston, April 8, 1825.

SERMON.

PSALMS CXXXII. 13.

FOR THE LORD HATH CHOSEN ZION: HE HATH DESIRED IT FOR HIS HABITATION.

THE worship of the Hebrews was not distinguished from that of other nations by its spirituality alone.—It was equally unlike that of all Pagan religions in a variety of external points: the perplexing number of its rites—the multiplicity of typical references—the excluding quality of its services—and its costly and splendid ceremonies. While other nations expended immense sums in the erection and decoration of national monuments, the Hebrews exhausted their vast treasures, and contributed the spoils of their enemies, to adorn and enrich the instruments of their religious institutions. And such was the pomp of their worship, that no stranger had ever been permitted to gaze at the routine of their temple-service without being impressed with a deep and durable sense of awe.—They were emphatically a religious people; parted from the rest of the world by this simple distinction, even independent of their peculiar and just views of Deity.

But the worship of the Hebrews was not merely ceremonial. The Synagogues scattered throughout all the land of Judea clearly testified the contrary.—They professed to adore him who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth. Yet the affections of this nation were set on the place of their ritual service: not only because it was the seat of their national grandeur, on which all their pains had been lavished—not only because it was their Capital in which their anointed king resided; but from other, and far more important considerations: Jerusalem was the spot where their temple was erected; it was the place of sacrifice for the remission of sins,—without which all worship would have been to an idle purpose. It was in Jerusalem that Jehovah condescended to answer the inquiries of the faithful, and to communicate his will in a supernatural, but intelligible manner. It was here the distinguishing favours of God had been pledged: and it was here the awful threatenings of his anger and chastisement had been formally denounced. In no light sense, then, was it deemed the special dwelling-place of the Most High; fit object of their esteem and regard. Mount Zion, on which the temple stood, was only another term for the same place; and was emblematically called the "habitation of the Lord, and the joy of his saints." The pious Jew made its praises a part of his morning and his evening song—"*beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion, the city of the great King.*" Both names were significant of the true church of God, and expressed all that was dear and sacred to the devotional bosom.

Even in the hour of death the sincere worshipper looked forward to Heaven as "the new Jerusalem," the place of the Holy One of Israel. Or when carried captive into a foreign land—where the music of the Levite was not heard—he wandered alone on the banks of the river, repeating that plaintive expression, "*If I forget thee, Oh Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.*"

But there were seasons in which this national attachment was peculiarly manifested: they were those of the three great festivals which they were enjoined to observe, by the ceremonial law: the feasts of Tabernacles, Passover, and Pentecost. Each of these occurred once a year. And at each, the males were directed to come up together from their provinces and towns, and appear before the Lord. The design of this was not only to unite the whole society together, and to promote unity and friendship; but it was, likewise, that as one Church they might form one great congregation; and, as "a shadow of good things to come," typify the gathering of the whole earth into the Church of Messiah. It was to this, most probably, the Apostle alluded, when with some of the feelings of such an occasion, he exclaims, "*ye are come—to the general assembly and church of the first born.*"—The expression which he uses literally means a convention on some joyful festival.

No ceremonial occasion of the richest nation on earth could have presented a more august and imposing appearance than was exhibited here. The flower of a populous and affluent country march up together

with all those exalted and exhilarated feelings which their errand was adapted to create. They ascend to converse with Jehovah. They are reminded of their dignity and their privilege, as the adopted children of the Eternal. They reach the gates of their much-loved city. The air is rent with the noise of instruments speaking the praise of God in general concert: and thousands of voices break in as a chorus to that symphony, in a strain of animating beauty; "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord: Our feet shall stand within thy gates, Oh Jerusalem."—"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls and prosperity within thy palaces." "*For the Lord hath chosen Zion: he hath desired it for his habitation.*" Happy people! But far more happy had they known the danger, as well as the blessing of distinguishing privilege.

In the foregoing remarks, we have explained to you the meaning of the title prefixed to the Psalm, from which our text is selected, as well as to fourteen others. This title is "a song of degrees." The Hebrew should have been rendered a *song of ascent* or *going up*. For we have great reason to believe, notwithstanding the apparent inappropriateness of part of these Psalms to that purpose, that they were metrical compositions, either intended, or set apart, for the ceremony of one of the annual ascents of the tribes.*

* Herderus de Genio Poet. Hebr. P. II. p. 367. & Hillerus Dis. in Psalm.

But in this explanation you likewise see the fitness of the language before us, for the occasion on which we have assembled:—"*The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation.*" So said the grateful Jew as he approached the courts of the Most High. And so may every Christian among us exclaim, in the midst of the mercies of the present hour. The typical Jerusalem is, long since, trodden under foot. Zion has been "ploughed as a field." But the Church of Jesus Christ, of which Jerusalem and Zion were temporary emblems, is still "the house of the living God;" and shall be blessed with his presence to the end of the world.

Let us attempt to shew you—I. *The value which Jehovah has set upon his chosen Zion.* II. *Let us inquire what will secure his blessing, or promote the prosperity of a particular Church.* The considerations which these topics furnish, well become the present occasion. In our "song of ascent" it were well to remember the dealings of the Head of the sanctuary, and our duties to him. These recollections will prepare us for a review of the past, in that part of Zion to which we belong.

I. *The value which Jehovah has set upon his chosen Zion.* This may be well understood by historical reference to the following facts. 1. That the changes in empires and kingdoms have been rendered, directly or indirectly, subservient to the good of the church.—II. That some dark dispensation of Providence has always followed apostacy, decline, or impurity in the Church. Let us glance at these facts.

I. The first prominent event in history which illustrates our position is that of the Deluge.—You had previously seen, that a melancholy defection from the true worship among a large portion of the world, had given rise to a formal distinction between the Idolaters and the worshippers of Jehovah. In this distinction, you will remember, that the former had been called the sons of men, and the latter the sons of God. Unhappily, the effort to preserve such a separation had proved abortive. Mankind, with the exception of a single family, who retained the knowledge of God, had become blended in their practice and views of religion. The consequences were fatal.* Iniquity contaminated the whole earth. It called not merely for retribution from the hand of an offended Creator, but for some extensive and radical change, to reach as far and as wide as its own disorganizing influence. That call was answered. The fountains of the deep were opened. And the transgressor discovered that neither numbers, nor power, nor wealth, nor wisdom, could stay that overwhelming flood which was required to cleanse a polluted world. But they who alone constituted the Church of the Lord, rode in security over this scene of desolation: and saw with wonder, that he, before whom "nations are as grasshoppers in the field," will carry on his system of national judgments, though

* Compare Gen. iv. 26. with vi. 1—5. In the first of these passages the text should read—"*then men began to be called by the name of the Lord*." an ecclesiastical distinction from the Idolater—a visible form of the Church.

it cost him a world; and will redeem the pledge of his covenant from the ruin in which every thing around it may be involved.

In process of time, this memorable dispensation was forgotten, or remembered with no salutary effect. Transgression abounded in those ancient governments which arose when the earth was re-peopled.—From these countries the Patriarchs were called and separated. They were appointed to constitute the true Church of Jehovah. They were guarded by extraordinary providences. They were protected by the Almighty presence. While the lands from which they were taken, were suffered to drive on in their career of idolatry, until the "set time" of Him who says to nations as well as to the waves of the ocean, "*thus far—and no farther.*"—Their ultimate fate is known to every reader of the Bible.

The extraordinary history of ancient Egypt presents a train of singular coincidents. It became the nursery of the early Church, without knowing what it was effecting. It fostered the members of that Church, while it kept them distinct from its own people: and by its very cruelty and persecution, prepared the way for their removal. When they were ripe for this measure, and the appointed period had arrived, in which it was to be effected, the opposition of their oppressors only facilitated their departure, and displayed the sovereignty of their Maker. We have not now time to consider those several causes which led on gradually to this issue. And yet it might be done in a most instructive manner; beginning with

the life of one whose contemplated murder by his brethren eventually founded the empire of Judah.

This people leave the land of their bondage, and arrive at the borders of Canaan at the very period when it was said—"*the iniquity of the Amorites is full:*" when the day of Divine forbearance was shut in; and hope and help were removed from the presumptuous transgressors for ever.. The judgments of the Most High complete his threatenings.

Fixed, at last, in their promised country, you mark the ingratitude, the backslidings, and the rebellions of this forgetful people. You see them punished.—You behold their repentance. You discover the return of favour. A sad infatuation follows them on.—The nations around are employed as instruments in the transactions of the Almighty with them: And in many an eventful crisis, proved how keenly his eye was gazing on the affairs of his Church.

The defection of the Ten Tribes from the house of David, and from the service of the Temple, ends in a series of iniquity, which cries aloud for vengeance. Here is an interesting spectacle. The Eternal is described as looking around for some instrument to inflict his judgments. He selects Assyria. Oh, how little politicians comprehend the leading causes of political changes! How imperfectly historians trace events to their sources! It was neither ambition, nor love of conquest, which formed the first cause of this revolution. Let us look to the Almighty himself.—Hear him explain it:—"*The Assyrian is the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indig-*

nation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath, will I give him a charge to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like mire in the streets. Howbeit, He meaneth not so, neither is it in his heart to think so; but it is in his heart to cut off nations not a few." It is the Lord himself who musters the hosts of Assyria to battle. The besotted tribes, driven from their native home, sink under the lash of his wrath, return no more to the land of their birth, and——where are they? The haughty Assyrian who proudly vaunted himself against Heaven, saw not that he was only the ram's horn, taken up, for a moment, to blow a fearful blast, and then to be thrown aside forever. Rendered a captive by his own toils, he perishes,—the contempt of his foes. And Jerusalem, the Church of the living God, continues secure.

Unhappily, Judah soon forgot herself. Prosperity and peace brought back ingratitude and crime. Judah must suffer. And Nebuchadnezzar was the chosen instrument to inflict the chastisement. The once favoured city is reduced to ruins; and her inhabitants are borne into captivity, to sigh under the willows of Babylon. But the Church?—no power on earth is permitted to destroy it. This mighty prince avows that God is not without honour by his people, even in the very land of their foes. He bends before a captive Jew: and Daniel foretells the melancholy fate of his empire.

Let us proceed. The appointed task of Babylon—once the glory of Chaldea—is now completed. She fell; not from causes of chance, but because she was wanted no more to accomplish the purposes of Zion. And the second great monarchy appears in the Medes and Persians. The transactions of Cyrus, who became a succeeding instrument, occupy much of the page of history: but it is only in the book before me that their designs are to be read. "*I have raised him up*,"—saith the Lord—"*I will direct all his ways. He shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives.*" "*I have even called thee by name; I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.*" The singular prophecies on this subject, were shewn to Cyrus: and he issues a proclamation for their fulfilment. He begins the re-erection of the temple. But fired with ambition to achieve new conquests, he proceeds to war with other nations. Inconsiderate man! he little reflected that no task was assigned him here. He perishes, to glut the vengeance of a woman.

After the Restoration, the Church advances under the favour of the Persian empire. Severity followed this favour. And the Persian empire gave way, accordingly, to the third great monarchy, established by one whom the Prophet calls the King of Grecia—Alexander the Great. To this prince the prophecies of Daniel were exhibited. Happy in the description of his own conquests, he leads his forces against the Persians, to finish the work of God's dispensations; so plainly and fully foretold: after which Jehovah

no longer needed him; and the order was given to cast him aside.

We need say nothing of the reign of Ptolemy Lagos; or recall to recollection, what should be familiar to most of you—the happy effect of a subsequent captivity of many of the Jews, in scattering among the nations a knowledge of the truth, preparatory to the coming of Messiah: Nor of the benefits of a subsequent league with the Roman power, then becoming the fourth great empire of the world; Nor of the very remarkable political situation of the earth at the period of the Saviour's advent, so admirably contrived to prepare for the completion of that prophecy. The field is too extensive to be traversed in the short time allotted to a single discourse. It is enough to say, that the once-favoured people of God, had, by multiplied evils, filled up the cup of their own iniquity. And having handed down the oracles of God, as well as a record of their own history, as a lesson to the world,—they were scattered over the earth, a by-word in the mouths of nations.—Yet before that prediction should be fulfilled, it was necessary, and it was ordered, that the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ should be completely founded.

The vast extent of the empire of Rome prepared for the universal extension of the Christian Church—the "chosen Zion"—and the cross became the honour of the imperial crown. But when Rome had finished *her* task, the blood of her victims called aloud; and she paid the forfeit of her crimes, her folly, and her superstition. Like all preceding governments, she

was, without knowing it, only an instrument for the purposes of God.

Stand, my dear brethren, on Zion—the spiritual Zion! Behold the meaning of political changes!—See the glory of diadems passing away like smoke! Observe that memorable truth, written by the finger of God—*nothing shall destroy,—every thing shall advance the church of the Saviour!*

II. Our second position was, that *some dark dispensation of Providence has always followed apostacy, decline, or impurity, in the Church.* And this is an evidence of his care over it, and of his determination to preserve it pure, until the day of the Redeemer's final appearance. Much that we have said is in proof of this position. But the whole history of the church demonstrates it. He "held the wind in his fists" until the ark was constructed: but then he unsealed the fountains of the deep. He manifested his power to the departing Israelites: but when infidelity began her murmurs, and a spirit of idolatry supplanted the worship due to him alone, he spoke—and six hundred thousand were victims of his curse! He spoke—to intimate most plainly, that a God offended can do without the help of his creatures to complete what he has begun: that a God offended numbers not the guilty—he only considers the crime. When the infatuated Hebrews neglected his commands, and devised counsels for themselves, was he ever at a loss for "a scourge of his indignation?" Is the whole history of this people less than an example of the principle we have assumed?

Descend, then, to the infancy of the Christian Church, and follow it on to its present stage of advancement. Mark the Churches of Asia in their folly and their fall! Darkness succeeded impurity; and their candlestick has never returned.

Never was mistake more gross than that of those who have attributed the decline of any part of Zion, in the darker ages, merely to a superstition consequent to the nature of the human mind. That superstition was but an instrument—a judicial weapon in the hands of God—to inflict his judgments on the presumptuous offender, or the daring apostate. Look at the Church of Rome: for upwards of fourteen centuries the promoter of idolatry and superstition. Hear her, under the very sanction of ecclesiastical law, address a creature as "the highest among the highest;"* as exalted above the Creator himself. But her spirituality was gone. In assuming the dominion of the Eternal, she has only displayed to the world the meaning of that forbearance and long suffering which wait until "the set time" has come; then to give way to the terrors of an Almighty avenger; and then to remain in the memory as a memorial of justice, when he begins his work of desolation.

It may be assumed with safety, that, in proportion to the extent of influence possessed by a Church, will be the extent of the punishment arising from its impurity. So has it been with the Church of Rome. History is full on this fact, although it assigns only secondary causes.

* "*O summa in excelsis.*" Hymn to the Virgin Mary.

And after the light of the Reformation had extended so far, have we not a continued confirmation of this truth? There has not been a single government on the continent of Europe, which evinced a tone of sincere friendship to pure Christianity. Each endeavoured to render religion a mere machine in political management. And what has been the consequence? Europe has exhibited, for many years past, nothing but a succession of convulsion and revolution, interrupted only by a few short pauses of awful stillness—"the dreadful note of fresh preparation."

It was well said by a Deist of the last century, that "the history of the Jews is a stumbling-block to Infidelity." Could he have stood for a little time, on the spiritual Zion, and read the history of the world as it may there be read, or looked from this elevation on the passing events below him, and beheld the bearing of every change on the Church of God, he would have exclaimed, with a broader meaning, "every thing is a stumbling-block to Infidelity!"

In concluding this part of my subject, I will make no apology for the brevity of these hints. They are necessarily imperfect. But I have gained an important point, if they lead you, my dear brethren, to a careful investigation of the whole question. If I have been able to impress upon your minds the great and prominent truth, that Jehovah takes into his own hands, the direction of his "chosen Zion," you are prepared to inquire what means will secure the prosperity of a particular church: what will constitute it part of the true and "chosen Zion." This

is the question which we proposed to consider as a second part of our subject.

II. *What will secure a blessing, or promote the prosperity of a particular Church?* A careful inquiry into the history, at which we have cursorily glanced, would furnish a reply to this question from analogy.—The following, however, will be found Scriptural characteristics of a true Church; and as far as they are forgotten, the frown, instead of the blessing, of Jehovah, will rest upon a people, whatever their pretensions or their name.

I. *Purity of doctrine.* By this term, I do not mean merely an admission of those general doctrines which constitute the broad basis of what is commonly called *Christianity.* This is a term assumed by every Church in Christendom: equally by that whose temporal head is styled the vicegerent of God, and that which strips the Son of God of his divinity. I refer to those discriminating doctrines which draw a visible line between the professor of religion and the worldling: which come home in the form of demonstrative truth, to the affections as well as to the judgment: and which have a bearing on the life as well as on the conscience. I admit that a body of people, under the name of a Church, may assume to themselves the right of forming a creed suitable to their own notions of expediency; or adapted to their own ideas of propriety and reason: they may discard this or that principle and precept; or fritter down their meaning to a full consistency with our natural desires.—I admit too, that it is very practicable to find one,

who will inculcate, as their teacher, nothing more than this selection of principles: one who shall be moulded by the wishes of this people in every given particular. But is this a Church of Christ? Will its worship effect any other end than that of quieting the conscience for a season? No, Brethren. Jehovah will not suffer any new-modelling of his holy religion, with impunity. He may not send a visible curse. But he will leave such a people to that species of self-complacency which always attends a judicial blindness. The members of the true Zion desire to receive, and to understand, and to practice, all that their spiritual Head and Lord has enjoined or commanded. No considerations of temporal policy—no views of mere present advantage—no calculations to gratify the worldly-minded, will induce the true Church of God to swerve from one of His directions. If others fall not in with them, it were to be regretted: but to sacrifice a jot of practical truth for the acquisition of members to their body, were to pay an infinite price for a comparative trifle. The Master of the Temple would assuredly inscribe on its walls—"*Ichabod! the glory is departed!*"

II. *Harmony among its members* is necessary, to secure the prosperity of a church. There may be those who would have placed this important characteristic at the head of this part of our subject. And there are certainly those, in most Christian societies, who, from motives of mistaken prudence, would sacrifice something of the spirituality of religion to secure the peace and harmony of their members.—

This, however, is not that Heavenly wisdom which is "*first pure, then peaceable.*" And which would contend forever, and endure every reproach, rather than make a treaty for peace by the relinquishment of evangelical purity.

Harmony distinguished the ancient Zion while prosperity prevailed in her palaces. And we add, that an affectionate and united congregation of worshippers—whose views and feelings are one, in all that is of importance—who have a single eye to the same end—who desire together the advancement of the Redeemer's glory—who are ready, each in his turn, to sacrifice private feelings and private views, for the general interest—and whose only striving is to emulate each other in the advancement of that end—in a word, a congregation who are bound together by ties created through habits of sincere piety—present a more lovely spectacle to the God of the sanctuary than the most splendid display of Hebrew rites. There is something in such a spectacle which commands the attention and respect of the most confirmed worldling. It calls together all those tender associations which we connect with the idea of a numerous and affectionate family. It furnishes the best image which this world can furnish, of that blest society who unite in the praises of Heaven.

It was reflections such as these which mingled in the "songs of ascent;" and which made a part of that very praise from which our text was taken: "***Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. As the dew of Hermon and as the***

dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forever more."

Peace was the apostolic benediction: because without it little could be accomplished: and because it implied in itself a full opportunity for every scheme of evangelical devising. Believe us, there is the same necessity for cutting off the meddling or slanderous peace-breaker from an Ecclesiastical body, as for sundering the mortified limb from the frame it endangers.

In the members of the same congregation, there ought to be a reciprocal desire to promote the welfare of each other. This desire should not, and would not, interfere with a sincere and affectionate charity for other denominations of evangelical religion. We may have our preferences and partialities; while we feel, and claim, a relationship to other members of the great family of Christ; whose worship in mode, manner, and place, may differ from ours. And we have no hesitation in calling that spirit accursed, which finds its hope of acceptance in the observance of little non-essentials, and on the merit of these, claims the prerogative of standing on a particular and insulated ground of its own. But the preferences of which we speak, are not inconsistent with the purest temper of charity. And this reciprocal desire to promote each other's welfare, as members of the same branch of Messiah's family—if it existed in its proper character, and arose from its proper cause, in every congregation—would effectually destroy that invidious and repulsive feeling, which sectarianism so fondly cherishes.

III. A third characteristic of an accepted Church, is the prudent, but efficient, *exercise of discipline among its members.* I am aware that there are those—though I have reason to believe that none such are present—who deny, or at least doubt, the expediency of any exercise of discipline in the church of Christ: who conceive its members to be amenable to no Spiritual judicatory on earth. A few words on this subject may not be inappropriate.

The error of this opinion lies here: in supposing that the Church is a mere assemblage of worshippers, bound together by no compact—who meet at stated periods according to a set form—who, in that act, have no relation to one another—but each of whom is apart from the rest in his concerns with Jehovah. It seems singular, my dear brethren, to one who has ever studied Christianity as it is in the Bible, that notions so crude and undigested, should ever be advanced by men, who, on other points, are judicious and sensible. But it is one of the many proofs that the world think more loosely on matters relating to the soul, than on those of temporal interest: In the latter, every thing is reduced to system: In the former, there is a disposition to act and feel as if the Creator had given no other revelation of his will than a broad outline, to be filled up by ourselves, according to our own preference.—But let us recollect that the Church of God is founded on principles inherent in our nature—the principles of *social compact.* And hence a public covenant is distinctly enjoined: Hence the institution of the Eucharist: Hence the Divine engagements and dealings with

a church as with individuals, in numerous particulars; hence much that is directed by the Apostolic epistles which can be understood in no other way. The kingdom of Messiah, on earth, could not, on any other plan, appear in a visible form: much less could that kingdom advance in its march to a final consummation. But a social compact without order would be a paradox: Order without law or rule would be equally so. What then is the state of the fact? It is this: the Head of the church has, from its first foundation, appointed for it a system of laws and regulations, consonant with his practical precepts, by which it was to be governed. Who is conversant with the Scriptures that does not see this in the Jewish economy? It is the exclusive subject of many a chapter in the Old Testament. And did the Saviour banish order and rule when he substituted the substance for the types and shadows of spiritual religion? On the contrary, he refers to the necessity of ecclesiastical discipline.* And not one of us is ignorant of the frequent reference to this subject in the Epistles.†

Is it said that these scriptural views were intended only for the period at which they were written?—Then why not fancy the same of every preceptive direction in the New Testament? Or, if any are retained, which ones shall be favoured and spared, by this sweeping proscription? There is a secret infidelity lurking under this idea; which would willingly

* Math xviii 15—18. John xx 21—23.

† I Cor. v. II Cor. ii. 6—11. Gal. v. 7—13. Tit. iii. 10, 11. & I Tim. i. 19, 20, are but a few of many examples.

prove, if it could, that most of the Divine directions were designed only for a past age, and are wholly inapplicable to that in which we live. And—let me add—if it proved this, it would, at the same time, demonstrate the necessity of a new revelation to enable us to comprehend the meaning of the one we possess; or to explain what part of it is to be received, and what portion is to be rejected. Believe me, brethren, mankind are by no means so much advanced in moral dignity and worth, as to stand in less need of regulation or discipline, than they did eighteen centuries since.

But there is another light in which it is worth while to set this subject before you: Have not the different societies or associations of men, formed for different purposes, their own laws, by-rules, and discipline? And does any one, not a member of such society or association, interfere with these? Is it not a tacit and general consent, that they have a right to govern themselves as they think proper?—Surely, then, it is not asking too great a concession from candour, to bespeak the same indulgence in behalf of a body of men, who unite under the name of a Church; and who inflict no censure, impose no restrictions, and exercise no discipline, excepting among themselves! Nor can there be danger from undue influence here. Ecclesiastical government, in the Presbyterian Church, at least, is wholly in the hands of representatives of its members, chosen by themselves, and from their own body. Yet independent of

this,—and very far apart from all such reasoning,—the Church of Jesus Christ is expressly *commanded* on this subject. And where it is neglectful now, the withering influence of Jehovah's frown is likely to rest with as much severity as it did on some branches of Zion in former days.

IV. A Church which God will prosper *will be linked with his cause at large.* It is a part of his cause and his kingdom; and, while it continues true in fealty to him, can never be separated from them. In this interesting connection, it watches their progress.—It marks "*the signs of the times*" with unaffected feeling. It discovers in them, new duties,—the necessity of new exertions—the presentation of new claims—and the encouragement of new hopes. It looks forward, as did the Hebrew Church in its purest state, to the final accomplishment of Messiah's glory. And the advancement of this noble end is the subject of its prayers, as well as the object of its efforts. In view of angels what spectacle can be more beautiful than that of a pure and prosperous Church,—itself refreshed by the spiritual dews of Heaven—in the posture of eager expectation, stretching forward to behold new conquests of grace in a world of sin—or gazing with pity upon benighted regions, for which it has learned to act, as well as to supplicate. It is not a nominal, or too flattering distinction, to call that church, an auxiliary and co-worker with God! On the other hand, I have the highest authority to support the affirmation, that a church which is actuated by sordid and selfish views—which does not feel itself a part of

the general Zion, and mingle therewith its charities and its sympathies—which professes to take an isolated station far as possible from the field of Christian action—may have "*a name to live*," but is most likely to be as sickly and feeble in all that relates to spirituality, as it is inefficient and worthless to the cause of the Redeemer.

V. *A spirit of prayer among its members* is indispensable, to secure the blessing of God upon any particular part of Zion. Where this prevails in a religious community, every thing else is generally safe. Where this is wanting, all else is unquestionably defective. The Church which is depending upon the zeal or abilities of the Pastor for its prosperity, is involved in a practical error which will be mischievous, if not fatal, to its welfare. Jehovah has styled himself "*a jealous God.*" And it is an expression of fearfulness, which deserves the most solemn consideration of every Christian society, and which he himself indited—"*Thus saith the Lord; cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm.*" A pastor may labour with energy, and exhort with fervour, and reason with power,—yet if his hands be not upheld by a spirit of prayer, the only effect of his anxiety and his exertions is likely to be visible in the searing influence of a rejected Gospel. Oh how imperfectly do the best of Christian churches comprehend the importance of this acknowledged principle! How sadly apt are they to depend upon mere instruments, instead of directly coming up, themselves, to bespeak, and lay hold, of the blessing! But I will detain you no longer with

these particulars. Nor have I adverted to one of them because I saw any peculiar necessity for doing so in your own case, more than in that of others: but because on this occasion it is fit and proper to "*stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance,*" in matters which are closely connected with the vital concerns of Zion.

From the foregoing remarks you will have seen that God redeems his pledge, so significantly expressed when it is said, he "*hath chosen Zion.*" You have seen the rise and fall of empires and kingdoms superintended, timed and directed, with the single design of advancing or purifying the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. You have seen that within its bounds alone is safety or protection. You behold every thing else uncertain and fluctuating; while this marches with a sure and steady step to a final consummation of grandeur and glory. Convinced of this fact, you have turned your attention to that important inquiry—what will secure the prosperity of any particular branch of the church: or, what will ensure to you a part and lot in the great interests of this chosen Zion. My dear brethren, may it be yours to share in these interests, and thus to remain forever a part of the body of Christ! May it be yours to remain, in a different and far more happy state, when the pageantry of all human things shall have passed away, and the members of the new Jerusalem look on with admiration and praise, while all creation assumes a new and eternal form. Even then,—when dismay shall sit on the countenances of unnumbered millions—may thou-

sands be seen ranking among the sons and daughters of God, whose birth shall have been dated in this, his earthly temple!

Ye have set apart this hour in particular remembrance of the dedication of this sanctuary. Like the Hebrews of old ye have come up with the "song of ascent." It is fourteen years, this day, since a voice familiar to many of you in months that are past,—a voice dear to my own recollection as it is to yours—first broke the silence of these walls, to announce their consecration to the service of the Almighty: "We are assembled to make a free-will offering to the God of Jacob; to present him with a house, in which to record his name—to manifest his glory, and to make his power known, and the riches of his grace, in preparing sons and daughters for the Jerusalem above."* Those were ardent and holy hopes which animated the bosom of him who first ministered at this altar.—"Here God shall sit upon the mercy seat, at the foot of which we present our prayers and our tears. Hither shall some of us bring our burdens and lay them down at the feet of Jesus. Hence shall issue the overtures of Mercy to the guilty of the present generation, and balm be here administered to the broken heart. Here the trembling sinner shall inquire for the Saviour, and find his gloom penetrated with the beams of hope. Here the believer shall sit down at the Supper of God, and have his soul wrapt hence away

* Dr. Flinn's Sermon on the dedication of this Church, delivered on the 3d of April, 1811.

to the temple of which the Lamb is the light."* But these hopes did not animate a solitary bosom: they pervaded those of hundreds. The fire of a sacred zeal spread from heart to heart: Faith fanned that flame, while she looked forward from the redemption of living souls, to the salvation of generations yet unborn. But whatever has been realized by these expectations thus far, vicissitude and affliction were but little anticipated by the sanguine and zealous temper. In an hour such as that, we too easily forget that sorrow is as necessary to purify the Church of God, as it is to establish the graces of the individual Christian. The brief detail which is before us affords an instructive lesson, while it is adapted to humble every one of us in sight of him who regulates the destinies of his people.

At the first meeting of those who contemplated forming a Presbyterian Church in this city, under the care of the General Assembly of the United States, *fourteen* individuals were present.† Of this number *six* are now the only survivors.

At a second meeting,‡ their number, which had somewhat increased within the interval of a month, was deemed sufficient to authorize them to call a pastor to take charge of this infant association: with the reasonable expectation that out of a numerous and growing population, considerably remote from the places of worship then in the city, a congregation

* Id. p. 34.

† February 8th, 1809.

‡ 6th of March.

would soon be formed under the most favourable auspices. It was at this period that a Committee of *five* were appointed, under the direction of the late Dr. Hollingshead, to invite the Rev. Andrew Flinn to the pastoral charge. *Four* of this Committee are numbered with the dead.

At the first conference held with the Pastor elect,* *thirty-one* members composed the new Congregation. Of these *fifteen* are now no more.†

At a more advanced state of the Society,‡ the signatures of those who were members of the Corporation, and who acted as such, amounted to *seventy-nine; thirty-six* of whom have "slept with their fathers."

Not long after the record of these signatures, *three* Elders were elected; who composed the first Session of this Church: Of these, there sits but a single survivor among you, to listen to the account of the departed.

Painful and mortifying lesson to human vanity!—The review of a few short years, whose beginning seems but yesterday, presents you a long catalogue of the dead! The very place in which you have assembled assumes a sombre aspect in this review. Many of you do not reach your seats until you have trodden

* 24th March, 1809.

† It may not be out of place to state, that on the opening of this temple for Divine Service, the first Sessions of a Presbytery held in this city, and connected with the American Church, were held within its walls. This was the Presbytery of Harmony.

‡ 25th January, 1810.

over the ashes of him, whom you knew and loved and honoured; and whose memory I have seen embalmed, full often, by the tears of those who called him "spiritual father." I enter your own bosoms.—I see there, already, how this momentary review gathers to your sight the crowd of the departed. How many of the founders of this temple rise in succession before you—*Cunningham, Robertsons, Milligan, Boyd, Martindale, Pressly, Johnson, Noble,* ——— I cannot follow you in this dismal survey; nor recall with you the very many others who held these seats with you for a few fleeting months, and whose names are now registered among yonder tombs.

But was this all? was it Death alone that made such inroads among you, and so frequently prostrated hopes fondly cherished,—yet again, and again revived? Not so. The revolution of a few years produced more melancholy changes than death would ordinarily occasion, even where the ravages of disease were so well known. Adversity assumed more than a single form. And among these you saw this temple under a cumbrous load of debt, and the very existence of your Church threatened, for a time.

But could it be, that a foundation, erected in the midst of the incense of prayer, should be finally razed to the earth? Could it be, that the struggle for an enlargement of the spiritual Israel—made too with the very wrestling of faith, was to be utterly fruitless? So asked many a faithful spirit, when he stood on the mount to behold the *burning bush*, and to see it unconsumed. So inquired many a timid soul, when in

the moment of despondency he forgot that "*the Lord hath chosen Zion.*" It was a lambent flame that played around the object of his sight, and neither branch nor leaf was withered in its play.

You can tell, my dear brethren, what noble achievements may be perfected by a combined effort of active enterprize and prayer. In this critical hour, when Hell began to hope for the fall of one part of Zion, and when malignity predicted its desolation with a confident smile—in this very hour, the determined spirit of enterprize and prayer reached from one heart to another,—began its agency,—and completed its end. And you are now assembled to render the "song of ascent," with feelings of gratitude and expressions of praise.

But this is not to be the issue of the matter. We must review the past with mingled sensations of pleasure and pain. Not merely the pain which bereavement inflicts when the occasion reminds you of the departed: nor the recollection of past anxiety, doubts and fears. Could angels mingle in this engagement with us, they would point to a cause of sorrow which abides in the midst of us still. It is in those on whom our hopes have so fully rested—who have stood by this sanctuary in its external concerns, even when others shrunk from responsibility and danger—it is in those who, in activity and benevolence, plainly discovered of what worth they might be to the cause of God, with a heart devoted to his Son—who from an early date, have looked on to behold others pressing into the kingdom

of Heaven—and yet who in every refreshing from on high have remained, like the fleece of Gideon, unmoistened by the dews that fell. Oh, suffer me by the consideration of the changes I have named, and by the solemn argument which they draw from the uncertainty of life—suffer me to gather a plea from this very occasion to urge you, once more, to accept the tenders of the Gospel! Fathers, and brethren, I would not see you standing aloof from the covenant of Grace, in the very temple which has been the object of your care, and in which the cup of salvation has been so repeatedly offered. Realize, we pray you, realize our hopes, by assuming a place, to which we have so often invited you, and where we long to see you—a place in the spiritual ranks of Messiah!

Professors of religion; all that we have said, and in a very especial manner the occasion on which we have assembled, present an appeal to every member among you. It is yours to fill the breaches which death has made. It is yours to guard the spirituality of this branch of the Church, from all that would pollute it. In the increase of your number, receive an earnest of the willingness of the Head of the Church to prosper, yet more, his "chosen Zion." Let the smile of God which has rested upon you, during the year that is past, be your encouragement to new and more vigorous exertion. Oh, let us make this very hour, so well fitted to form a new era among us, the starting point of unremitting prayer for Zion, and the

date of holy resolutions made in the strength of God. Come—we will resolve together, to watch for the good of Jerusalem. We will lay hold of the promise which God hath given concerning it—"*they shall prosper that love thee.*" And if, before another such season as this shall have arrived, either of us return to Him who sent us here, may it be said of such—he hath "fallen in Israel"—his spirit hath fled,—but the light of his example is visible still!